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General Assembly
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Official Records

92nd plenary meeting
Tuesday, 14 March 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 20 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Draft resolution (A/54/L.80)

The Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.80.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt): I have the honour to introduce, on behalf of the African Group, under agenda item 20 (b), the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.80, entitled "Assistance to Madagascar following the tropical cyclones".

The draft resolution contains six preambular and seven operative paragraphs. In the preambular section of the draft resolution, the General Assembly expresses its grave concern at the extensive damage and the devastation caused by the tropical cyclones Eline and Gloria and the floods which have struck Madagascar. It also notes with concern that these natural disasters have been aggravated by various epidemics which have resulted in the loss of human lives. Furthermore, while recognizing the efforts of the Government and people of Madagascar to provide relief and emergency assistance to the victims of these disasters, the General Assembly expresses its awareness that, to mitigate the consequences of this disaster, international assistance is required, both for emergency relief and for rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure.

In the operative section of the draft resolution, the General Assembly expresses its solidarity with the Government and people of Madagascar and notes with satisfaction the efforts of the Government and people of Madagascar to provide rapid relief to the victims through their own means. The General Assembly also expresses its gratitude to the international community, including organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, for the measures it has taken to support the efforts of the Government of Madagascar to carry out relief operations and provide emergency assistance and requests States and international organizations to provide additional emergency support to Madagascar with a view to alleviating the economic and financial burden which the people of Madagascar will have to bear. Finally, the General Assembly requests the Secretary-General to make all necessary arrangements to continue mobilizing and coordinating humanitarian assistance from the specialized agencies and other organizations and bodies of the United Nations system with a view to supporting the efforts of the Government of Madagascar.

00-34292 (E)

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I wish at this point to draw members' attention to a minor revision to operative paragraph 7. That paragraph would now read as follows:

> "*Requests* the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-fifth session under the item on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance, through the Economic and Social Council at the next humanitarian segment of its substantive session in 2000 on the implementation of this resolution."

The exact magnitude of the disaster that has befallen Madagascar has yet to be seen. The two recent cyclones have caused severe damage, both to Madagascar's infrastructure and to its agricultural capacity. It is estimated that over 10,000 people have been left homeless by the floods and that more 170 have already lost their lives. The Government of Madagascar has estimated that 560,000 persons have been affected by the damage resulting from the cyclones and has launched an emergency aid appeal for $3.7 million for those who have been affected.

I would like, on behalf of the African Group, to express our sincere appreciation for the efforts of the international community, States and organizations alike, to assist Madagascar in its hour of need and urge it to continue to provide emergency assistance to mitigate the severe damage that has resulted from the recent cyclones and to respond generously to the appeal launched by the Government of Madagascar in this regard.

It is therefore our fervent hope that the General Assembly will support the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.80.

In this connection, I have the honour to announce that the draft resolution has been co-sponsored by the following member States: Algeria, Barbados, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Germany, Guyana, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Monaco, Morocco, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Norway, Portugal, Saint Lucia, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Mr. Brito (Portugal): The General Assembly is meeting once again, just a few days after it convened to hear about the dramatic situation in Mozambique resulting from the unrelenting floods, to consider yet another draft resolution, on the dire situation caused by the two recent cyclones that struck Madagascar.

The European Union would like to present its condolences to the Government and the people of Madagascar for the loss of life caused by these two disasters, which hit that country in quick succession last month and at the beginning of March. The situation is compounded by the fact that the disaster occurred at a time when an epidemic of cholera had already claimed the lives of over 1,000 people.

According to the available reports, thousands of people have been forced out of their homes by the cyclones, and more information is now starting to emerge on the number of other people who have also, to varying degrees, been affected by these natural disasters.

We understand that severe agricultural damage may also have been sustained in some areas, and that houses and infrastructure in the path of the storms were destroyed. Moreover, the destruction of roads and railroads is hampering the movement of food and other commodities, delaying the arrival of much-needed assistance to affected populations.

The European Union and its member States would like to commend the United Nations agencies already active on the island for their efforts in bringing assistance to the populations cut off by the floods, as well as the active participation in these efforts of other organizations, including non-governmental organizations, which have rushed to the areas hit by the disaster and are now coordinating their activities with the Government of Madagascar in order to ensure that the assistance they are providing is as effective and swift as possible.

We understand that assessment missions are already under way or are being planned, including a mission by the European Community Humanitarian Office. The full picture of the disaster will be clear only later on. The European Union is waiting for the appeal to the international community, which will be launched soon, before further deciding on future assistance to Madagascar.

The European Union attaches great importance to the humanitarian work of the United Nations, as attested to by its close involvement with and participation in the various consultation processes in this area. The European

Union stands ready to contribute constructively to the development of our common and consensual position in the humanitarian area. However, we wish to point out that this would be greatly facilitated if we were offered the opportunity of being involved at an early stage in the work on all draft resolutions.

The European Union is hopeful that this draft resolution will contribute to the efforts of the international community to alleviate the plight of the people of Madagascar.

Mr. Osio (Nigeria): On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, Nigeria would like to convey its appreciation for the convening of this meeting on yet another sad occasion, in connection with the cyclone that struck Madagascar, a developing State Member of this Organization. Not very long ago, we gathered to express our solidarity with Mozambique.

Natural disasters continue to take their toll. Humanity is ever united, even in the face of this tragedy. The Group of 77 and China welcomes the international response, which Madagascar so direly needs at this time of tragedy. On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, we pledge the commitment of every member of the Group to work towards a concerted universal solution to this problem, even a solution that would include avoiding a recurrence in the near future.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.80, entitled "Assistance to Madagascar following the tropical cyclones", as orally revised.

Before proceeding to take action on the draft resolution, I should like to announce that since its introduction, the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.80: Andorra, Benin, Bolivia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Guatemala, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Lithuania, Malta, New Zealand, Nigeria, the Philippines, Qatar, San Marino, Solomon Islands, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/54/L.80, as orally revised?

Draft resolution A/54/L.80, as orally revised, was adopted (resolution 54/96 M).

Mr. Morel (Seychelles): Seychelles is also a sponsor of the draft resolution. We did what was necessary before the meeting was convened. I would like to confirm that fact, and ensure that we are represented in the records.

The Acting President: We take note of the statement of the representative of Seychelles.

I call on the representative of Madagascar.

Mr. Bakoniarivo (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): First of all, allow me to thank the President very warmly, on behalf of the delegation of Madagascar, for having convened this meeting to adopt resolution 54/96 M, regarding assistance to Madagascar, which was struck by the tropical cyclones Eline and Gloria.

The adoption by consensus of this resolution shows that the entire international community is deeply concerned by the critical situation of developing countries that fall prey to natural disasters. This decision bears witness once again to the international solidarity enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The Government of Madagascar is particularly grateful to the members of the Assembly for this display of sympathy and solidarity.

My delegation would like to express its gratitude to Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, who, in his capacity as Chairman of the African Group for this month, kindly introduced the draft resolution. My delegation is also very touched by the gesture made by all the delegations that sponsored the resolution. We are also very grateful to the delegations that by their statements showed their support for and sympathy with the people and the Government of Madagascar. Those delegations were Portugal, speaking on behalf of the European Union, and Nigeria, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate the very warm thanks and deep gratitude of the Government of the Republic of Madagascar to the States, international, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and associations that have, since the beginning of the calamities, assisted Madagascar in this difficult time. Nor can we overlook, in this regard, the diligent and effective work that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has done at Headquarters in New York, in Geneva and in the field. We also greatly appreciate the efforts of the Resident Coordinator. Lastly, I would like to once again reiterate our thanks to the Secretary-General for the appeal for

support to Madagascar that he launched in the wake of the tropical cyclones.

Following the example of others committed to the rebirth of Africa, the Government of Madagascar during this last decade increased its efforts to emerge from economic stagnation and to place the country solidly on the path of sustainable development. With this objective, difficult and often painful measures were taken to increase the productive potential of the Malagasy economy. These efforts are unfortunately now being hindered by the all-too-frequent occurrence — it is almost yearly — of cyclones, which very rapidly wipe out previous significant development progress. These cyclones put the country's food security at risk and also severely affect the national infrastructure and the resources on which the Madagascar economy essentially depends. This year, Madagascar was once again hit in a very short space of time by two cyclones that took a toll of many victims and caused a great deal of material damage.

The preliminary figures are that 25 per cent of the health-services infrastructure in the affected areas was destroyed and that 560,000 people have suffered losses. In addition to the cyclones, which affect human and natural resources, other natural disasters — such as locust invasions in 1997, 1998 and 1999, drought and marine erosion — have undermined the development prospects of Madagascar.

My country's Government undertook the necessary measures to tackle the emergency situation. But given the scope of the damage and the precariousness of the economy, Madagascar is not in a position to meet the needs of the victims on its own. These needs have been estimated to amount to $3,681,361. This is the provisional estimate in the latest report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

We are confident that in response to the appeal contained in the resolution that has just been adopted, a great number of international actors will participate or continue to participate significantly in the emergency rescue and assistance efforts.

However, we should not overlook the fact that, notwithstanding the magnitude of emergency assistance provided in cases of natural disasters — which focuses on reducing somewhat people's immediate problems — this type of action has its inherent limits. Once the crisis is over, the whole problem of rehabilitation remains. This is why the Government of Madagascar would like to draw the attention of the international community to the economic and financial difficulties that my country will face in its reconstruction effort, which must be carried out under particularly unfavourable conditions. At the appropriate time my delegation will take the opportunity to raise these issues with the appropriate bodies of our Organization.

Two very important aspects of the problem are worth raising already. First, rehabilitating equipment and infrastructure will require increasing public expenditure beyond sustainable levels, and a significant part of the resources that had been earmarked for development projects will have to be diverted. Secondly, the national economic-growth prospects will be seriously undermined by the drop in production resulting from the damage done to the agricultural, transportation, communications and energy sectors, and the loss of exports will worsen the balance of payments.

In view of these difficulties, we express the hope that the international community will consider favourably and with understanding the extent to which it could participate in the rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes. This hope is justified by our belief that the present and future steps undertaken by my Government will receive the full attention of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 20.

The meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.